STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Crash of Helicopter, engaged by ONGC in Mumbai High, on 11th August, 2003.

The MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): Madam, I am indeed sorry to inform the hon. Members that in an extremely unfortunate accident, an MI-172 helicopter, chartered by the ONGC from the MESCO Airlines, crashed in the morning of 11th August. The helicopter had taken off from the ONGC Helibase at Juhu, Mumbai at 1137 hrs. The helicopter landed on the ONGC's Rig-Sagar Kiran, and took off from there at 12.15 hrs. to move to another ONGC rig-Sagar Jyoti. Immediately on take-off from the Sagar Kiran, the helicopter crashed into the sea with 25 passengers, including 14 Officers and 8 Workmen of ONGC, 3 contract employees and 4 crewmembers.

Rescue operations were immediately initiated by launching rescue boat from the Sagar Kiran as well as by mobilising ONGC vessels, in the vicinity. Other helicopters, on charter, were also pressed into service for search and rescue. The Coast Guard and the Navy also joined the search and rescue operations within one hour. While 2 persons had been rescued, bodies of 3 persons, who died in the incident, had been recovered. The multipurpose supply vessels, deployed by the ONGC, have located the debris of the ill-fated helicopter on the early morning of 12th August, at a depth of around 80 metres. In the early hours, today, the helicopter was retrieved from the sea bottom and 22 bodies were found therein and identified. Search continues for remaining two bodies.

As per the information available from the ONGC, the helicopter was reported to be airworthy, and no snag was reported at the time of take off on 11th August, 2003. The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas had requested the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the same day, to institute an enquiry to tobk into the circumstances of the incident. The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has accordingly ordered a statutory investigation by Shri V.K. Chandna, Deputy Director General.

In addition to the above, it has been decided to hold an independent inquiry by a three-member Committee which, *inter alia*, would look into the safety and security of life in offshore operations, especially air logistics, the maintenance, repairs and renovation of offshore structures and pipelines, hiring of helicopters and matters ancillary thereto. The Committee would report within three months.

The CMD, ONGC, has been asked to draw up an emergency plan to further strengthen the safety measures for air transportation in the offshore, so as to make them fully comparable with the best global standards, in consultation with DGCA, within a fortnight.

As per the ONGC's policy, the families of the deceased employees are entitled to financial compensation, ranging from Rs.14.3 lakh to 23.5. lakh, besides standard benefits, like Contributory Provident Fund, Gratuity, Leave Encashment and Pension under Self-Financing Scheme etc. The contract employees are entitled to compensation under the Workmen Compensation Act. I have announced an additional *ex gratia* benefit of Rs. 5 lakh per employee.

After hearing the sad news of the incident, I rushed to Mumbai by the first available flight and went to Juhu Helibase of the ONGC. In Mumbai, I met representatives of Officers and Employees Associations and discussed the follow up measures with the CMD, ONGC and the Directors of the ONGC.

On 11th August, 2003, the Collectives from Mumbai Region had written to me regarding a number of their demands, pending settlement of which the Offshore operations may be affected from 0600 hours of 13th August 2003. This charter was received late at night on that day. I have urged the Collectives not to take any action which may adversely affect the oil and gas production from the Mumbai Offshore and thereby the national economy, at this critical juncture. I do hope that they would listen to my appeal and maintain normal production. Meanwhile, the ONGC management had approached the Mumbai High Court, which has directed the employees not to disrupt the production.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Was it the same helicopter, which was purchased from the Westland Company?

SHRI RAM NAIK: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What was the make of this helicopter?

SHRI RAM NAIK: It was a Russian make.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay.

श्री सतीश प्रधान (महाराष्ट्र) : धन्यवाद उपसभापति महोदया, मैं आपके माध्यम से आदरणीय मंत्री जी से चंद बातें जानना चाहता हूं। जो अखबारों में न्यूज आई है उनको देखने के बाद पता चलता है कि ओ0एन0जी0सी0 द्वारा जो हेलीकोप्टर ऑफशोर के लिए यूज किए जाते हैं उसकी देखभाल ठीक तरह से नहीं होती। एम.आई.-172 में कितने लोगों के बैठने की वाहन क्षमता है और कितना लोड कैरी करने की क्षमता है और उस समय जब उसका एक्सिडेंट हुआ तब उसकी परिस्थिति क्या थी इस विषय की भी जानकारी आवश्यक है। MI-172 हेलीकोप्टर दूसरे अन्य हेलीकोप्टर जो यूज होते हैं उन सबसे सुरक्षित है ऐसी बात विमान अधिकारी और पायलट वगैरह सब लोग कहते हैं। फिर भी यहां जो यूज किए जाते हैं उसके बारे मे बहुत सारी शिकायतें हैं, जैसे कि वहां पॉयलट भी कहते हैं और इंजीनियर भी कहते हैं कि वहां जो हेलीकोप्टर यूज किए जाते हैं उनमें उन्होंने कई बार ऐसा अनुभव किया है कि जहां पॉयलट बैठता है या अन्य जगह वहां बारिश के समय पानी अंदर गिरता है और अंदर छाता खोल कर बैठना पड़ता है। ऐसी भी न्यूज पब्लिश हुई है। एक कांट्रेक्टर जो कांट्रेक्ट लेबर देता है जो कल खुद मेरे साथ बैठा था, अपने खुद के अनुभव से वह बोल रहा था। मैं आपसे गुजारिश करुंगा कि आप इस विषय पर भी कुछ प्रकाश डालेंगे तो बहुत अच्छा रहेगा? गए अप्रेल मे मुम्बई हाई की तरफ वेल-412 जो एयरक्राफ्ट उधर से आ रहा था तो उसकी जुहू मे क्रेश लैंडिंग करने की आवश्यकता पड़ने लगी, ऐसी भी जानकारी अखबार मे आई है। 6 मई को पवनहंस का डाल्फिन हेलीकोप्टर जिसमे आंतरिक बिगाड़ हो गया और उसको जबर्दस्ती समुद्र मे लैंड करने की आवश्यकता हो गई, यह भी न्यूज आज के अखबार मे छपी हुई है। बार-बार वहां ऐसा संकट निर्माण हो रहा है तो इस विषय पर अभी तक ओ0एन0जी0सी0 ने क्या किया है उसकी भी जानकारी देने की कृपा करे। एसोसिएशन आफ साइंटिफिक एंड टेक्नीकल आफिसर्स के अध्यक्ष मीरचंदानी जी का कहना है कि दो दिन पहले उन्होने इसी हेलीकोप्टर से यात्रा की और उस समय उन्होंने अनुभव किया कि बारिश का पानी पॉयलट के सिर पर गिर रहा था। तो इस विषय पर भी जानकारी देने की आवश्यकता है?

आज के अखबार में एक और न्यूज आई है कि पवनहंस के साथ में हमारा करार है, एग्रीमेंट है। आवश्यकता पड़ने पर और प्रायोरिटी से पवनहंस से हेलीकोप्टर लेने का कांट्रेक्ट है। फिर भी अनुभव ऐसा है कि हमारे आफिसर्स बार-बार मेस्को के पास से हवाई जहाज लेने की कोशिश करते हैं। यह भी न्यूज आई है कि उनके लायक टेन्डर होने के लिए दो बार टेन्डर नोटिस का मुद्दत बढ़ाया गया था। टेन्डर्स की मुद्दत बढ़ाई गई थी। लोगों की जानकारी के लिए मंत्री जी इसके बारे मे आप खुलासा करिये कि सत्य परिस्थिति क्या है ताकि आपके बारे मे या आपके मंत्रालय के बारे मे लोगों के दिल में जो गलतफहमी फैलाई जा रही है, वह दूर हो सके।

यह उसमें सहायक होगी। यह भी बताया जाता है कि कम्पनी के अफसरों के मेसको से संबंध रहे हैं। इस विषय के बारे में लोगों के दिल से गलतफहमी हटाने की आवश्यकता है। यह भी बताया जाता है कि नागरिक विमानन महा संचालक ने कहा है कि मेसको की सेवा समाधानकारक नहीं है। उसने मेसको के बारे मे कुछ रिपोर्ट की है, ऐसा बताया जाता है। मेसको के बहुत सारे हेलीकॉप्टर जो चलते नहीं हैं, फिर भी उनका चार्जिज ओएनजीसी पर लगाया जाता है और इसके कारण ओएनजीसी को नुकसान होता है, ऐसा भी बताया जाता है। एमआई-172 के स्पेयर पार्ट्स रूस से जितनी आवश्यकता है उतनी मात्रा में उपलब्ध नही होते हैं, ऐसा बताया गया है। उसके बदले में नकली पार्ट्स इस्तेमाल किये जाते हैं, ऐसा भी आरोप लगाया जा रहा है। इस विषय मे सत्यता क्या है? इसकी जानकारी भी लोगों को देना जरूरी है। मेसको के हेलीकॉप्टर में रिसेंटली चार बार खराबी आई थी और उनको चलाना मुश्किल हो गया था, ऐसी भी जानकारी आई है। मेसको के संचालकों के विरुद्ध इंश्योरेंश कम्पनी, बैंक और फाइनेंशियल इंस्टीट्यूशन्स की शिकायतें हैं कि इन्होने उन्हे फंसाया था, उनको गलत इन्फारमेशन्स दीं और इसकी वजह से केन्द्रीय गृह मंत्रालय ने कार्यवाही करने के लिये कहा और इस विषय की भी जानकारी ओएनजीसी को दी गई थी। यदि यह सब सच है तो क्या आप इस विषय पर कुछ प्रकाश डाल सकते हैं? यदि इसके बारे मे इन्फारमेशन आपके पास हो तो दे दीजिए और नहीं हो तो आप इस विषय के बारे मे जानकारी लेकर दे दीजियेगा। यह लोगों के हित के लिए है। आपने अपने मंत्रालय मे अभी तक बहुत अच्छा काम किया है। आपके विरुद्ध जो प्रचार हो रहा है इसको रोकने के लिए इसकी आवश्यकता रहेगी।

उपसभापति महोदया, मैं तीन बाते और बताना चाहूंगा। जो इंडियन एक्सप्रेस में इनसाइड स्टोरी बताई गई है। I quote from the *Indian Express.* "The Inside Story" says, "We are forced to fly with extra body weight." एक पायलट ने यह बताया है। दूसरा, "It is like travelling in a bus in the sky. I remember this incident when three people were standing inside a chopper and they held on to rods for support." यह एक फ्लाइट इंजीनियर ने बताया है, " कभी तीन चार आदमी एक्सट्रा हो जाते हैं, sometimes there are three or four extra people" यह ओएनजीसी के आफीसर ने जानकारी दी है। ऐसा यह न्यूज पेपर बताता है। माननीय मंत्री जी अगर आप इस विषय पर कुछ प्रकाश डाल सके तो मैं आपका आभारी रहूंगा। धन्यवाद।

उपसभापति : आपको तो मंत्री जी से ज्यादा जानकारी है।

श्री सतीश प्रधान : आज के सभी अखबार इस विषय से भरे हुये हैं। मैं जानता हूं कि कुछ विषय ऐसे हैं जो सिविल एविएशन मिनिस्ट्री से संबंधित हैं। लेकिन कुछ जानकारी मंत्री जी को जरूर होगी, क्योकि वे तो बहुत सतर्क रहते हैं। आज सभी अखबार उन्होंने पढ़े होगे और इसके बारे मे जानकारी ली होगी। अगर जानकारी नहीं ली होगी तो वे पता करके बता देगे। धन्यवाद।

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI (Tamil Nadu): Madam Deputy Chairperson, the hon. Minister, in paragraph two of the statement,

mentioned that 22 bodies were found in the helicopter itself, which was retrieved from the sea bottom; three bodies were recovered; two persons were rescued. Madam, the rescue team was able to rescue two persons; how is it that the other people were left out? I would like to know whether the two rescued persons were swimming. I would like to know whether the five persons got themselves ejected out of the helicopter, or, they had come out by some other means. Is there any such mechanism in a helicopter, like it is there in a warplane, whereby, when the plane is shot down, the pilot can eject himself out of the plane? Is there any such mechanism in a helicopter?

My second clarification is this. What is the exact capacity of that helicopter? Was it overloaded or not?

Madam, my third clarification is this. In para 6 of the statement, the hon. Minister has been kind enough to announce an ex-gratia benefit of Rs. 5 lakh per contract employee. But, Madam, human beings are human beings. Why should you differentiate between the workmen and contract labourers? You can enhance the compensation amount for these contract labourers also who have lost their lives, as you have done in the case of workmen.

Madam, my last question is this. What is the present situation after the employees have announced a pen-down strike? Thank you, Madam.

SHRI RAM NAIK: Madam Deputy Chairman, I will try to give as much information as possible which is available with me. I am grateful to both the Members for trying to elicit more information. So far as the seating capacity of the helicopter is concerned, I would like to inform the House that the seating capacity of the helicopter is 26+4, that is, +4 is crewmembers. So, in all, the total capacity is, 26 passengers and four crewmembers, which is 30. Now, when this helicopter left the Mumbai Juhu Aerodrome, it had 24+4 persons. That means, it was two less than its maximum capacity. Then, it went to Sagar Kiran where some persons disembarked, and then some new passengers embarked; and, when it took off, it had 25+4 persons. That means, in both the cases, the number of passengers were less than the maximum capacity. So, on that count ...*(Interruptions)*...

6.00 P.M.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What is the capacity you said, *Mantriji*?

SHRI RAM NAIK: Madam, I said, "It is 30". That means, 26 passengers plus four crewmembers. That means, at both the times, the number of persons which the helicopter was carrying was less than the prescribed capacity. Then, this particular helicopter was certified for air-worthiness by the Civil Aviation authorities. That certificate is valid up to 30th March, 2004. So, that air-worthiness certificate is also there.

Now, as far as the fact that two persons could come out is concerned, every person who travels by the helicopter is trained. The two people could come out from the other side. Others could not come out because within two minutes of taking off, the helicopter collapsed. So, probably there was no time left. Only the Pilot came out, but the others had their belts tied, and that is why they could not come out. The two survivors also narrated the story; some newspapers are full of that. They have said that they could come out and escape because they were given training as to how to act in such situations of emergency. That training had helped them. That is how they were saved.

Now, about all other aspects, such as the leakage of water about which the President of the Association has said, the safety etc. would be inquired into. There would be two inquiries. One inquiry would be by the Director-General, Civil Aviation, about the safety and all other things connected with the helicopter. But, from the Ministry, we have ordered an inquiry, which would be an independent inquiry, which would mean that there would be no one from the ONGC on that Committee. The subjects which would be covered in the inquiry have been indicated. When I discussed it with the employees also, they were naturally agitated at first. I told them also that if they wanted to mention any additional point to me, it would be included as reference in the inquiries that we would conduct. That is why I am waiting for them to suggest anything more to be included.

Then, so far as the inquiry is concerned, the total requirement of ONGC from *Pawan Hans* is about 15 helicopters. All arrangements are made with *Pawan Hans*, but when there is some additional need, only then

outside agencies are approached. There are only two companies : MESCO and UB, both of them have helicopters, and when there is a need, only then they are approached. Otherwise, permanent contracts are with *Pawan Hans*. The tender system and all these things are followed up. When the inquiry is conducted, each item would be looked into, as to whether proper procedure has been followed.

Regarding the compensation, whatever compensation is available, I have indicated there. I have also announced *ex-gratia* there. About workmen, naturally, first, whatever is applicable according to the rules will be seen. A humanitarian approach would be definitely taken, so that their families are also taken care of.

About the spare-parts, these issues will be taken care of in the inquiry conducted by the Civil Aviation authorities. I cannot say about it; it is a technical thing, which they would look into.

About the association, I had nearly one-and-a-half hour discussion on the same day. I was the first person to reach there. Naturally, some employees were agitated. Afterwards they said that they should not have been so much agitated. But that apart, I reached them, heard them and had discussions with the Directors also. I told them there itself that we would conduct an independent inquiry which would cover all aspects such as the Mumbai-High, how the rigs are safe, what is the supply position there, etc. All these things would be looked into while we are conducting the inquiry.

About the propaganda in newspapers, I think in such cases, newspersons also report something. But I have given the factual position here. Somebody might have written something more. But one can imagine, when the helicopter went 80 metres down the water, the Navy, the Coast Guards, and the ONGC service vessels could take out that helicopter from a depth of 80 metres. You can just imagine the skill and efforts that would have been put in. We are extremely sorry for the engineers and other good persons. The ONGC has been doing very good work for the national economy. This year, it has earned the highest profits. It has crossed Rs.10,000 crores -- the first company to cross Rs.10,000 crores. We are trying to do everything possible. I suggest to the hon. Members that if they feel that a particular point should be inquired into, in addition to what I have indicated in my

statement, they can give that suggestion to me in writing. We will be drafting the terms of reference in the next two days. If there are any further suggestions, they are also welcome. I am sure that this accident will help us in a way to remove any lacunae, which are there. This is what I wanted to say.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Was it the first accident of its kind, or was there an earlier accident of this kind?

SHRI RAM NAIK: An accident was there, but that Helicopter could float. So, there was no damage.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It means there was an accident.

SHRI RAM NAIK: Yes. Accidents do take place.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Pawan Hans is using the West Land helicopters and a West Land helicopter had crashed at Vaishno Devi some years ago. Was there something wrong with that helicopter also?

SHRI RAM NAIK: It would be too technical a matter. Now, there are different types of helicopters; different types of aircrafts. Accidents are accidents. But one must take the maximum care to avoid them. It will be our duty to ensure that this inquiry indicates as to what type of new helicopters we should purchase and put in service. Pawan Hans is our PSU and that is why we have taken all the help from them, and that is how it is being worked out.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Make more inquiries technically. Only through you, the House can know. You may not be a technical person, but you have technical people at your disposal. Please find out. The last thing that I would like to say is about what Shri Virumbi has mentioned. He mentioned that there should not be a differential treatment in giving *ex gratia* payment because, first of all, they are contract labourers, so they do not have a permanent job; they do not have gratuity and provident fund facilities. Over and above, if the children of those who are permanent employees are suffering, so are the children of these contract labourers. As their sufferings are much bigger, you may give them the same compensation.

SHRI RAM NAIK: I assure you that whatever is being given to others, they will get the same compensation. There would not be any discrimination on that account.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, very much.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI: I thank Mr. Minister for having accepted my proposal.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You must thank me also because I put my weight to it.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI: Exactly, Madam, I thank you also.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Chair's weight is always heavier than the Member's. It is true in real terms also. The House is adjourned till 11.00 a.m. tomorrow.

The House then adjourned at nine minutes past six of the clock till eleven of the clock on Thursday, the 14th August, 2003.

MGIPMRND—3014RS—02-04-2004.